

## **Toronto faces storm clouds on horizon; Critics say the city needs to provide more funding for climate change plan**

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### **Body**

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More sweltering hot days. More rainstorms. More flooding.

Those are just some of the impacts climate change will have on Toronto, and according to a new report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world will see catastrophic damage by 2040, much earlier than expected.

Advocates say that now more than ever, Toronto needs to commit to and invest in its ambitious climate plan, which outlines a vision for the right things but has been left underfunded.

The new IPCC report found that if global greenhouse gas emissions continue at the current rate, the atmosphere will warm by 1.5 C by 2040, enough to kill off coral reefs and cause mass food shortages and wildfires, sooner than previous studies had predicted.

The city passed the TransformTO climate action strategy in July 2017, with the bold target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30 per cent by 2020, 65 per cent by 2030 and 80 per cent by 2050, based on 1990 levels.

But Dusha Sritharan, a climate change campaigner with the Toronto Environmental Alliance, says the plan has been underfunded for the last two years.

"This is part of the problem in terms of us falling behind in some of the commitments we're making," she said.

In December 2016, city council approved a package of short-term TransformTO strategies and a budget of just under \$335,000, and in 2017 it passed the full plan, with \$2.5 million allocated in the 2018 budget. But a 2017 staff briefing note on the subject estimated it would take \$1.5 million to implement in 2017 and \$6.7 million in 2018.

The plan includes actions and targets on retrofitting homes, renewable and low carbon energy, transportation and waste, touching on all aspects of everyday life. It includes a goal that by 2030, all new buildings will be constructed to produce near-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

"All of these things are fantastic and things that we really need the city to invest in, but these are not going to be things that we archive in that timeline we've set out if we continue to underfund the plan," Sritharan said.

Bryan Purcell, director of policy and programs at The Atmospheric Fund, said Toronto's 2030 target is "solid" and "consistent with what the IPCC is telling us we need to do," even under the new timeline.

But he agrees with Sritharan that the key is implementation.

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"Having the ongoing resources and the political will to implement the plan fully will be what makes the difference between Toronto fulfilling its part in this global climate challenge, or not," he said.

The director of the city's environment and energy division, Jim Baxter, said he "completely and utterly" disagrees that the plan is underfunded, adding that the city is on track to meet the 30 per cent reduction by 2020.

"I think we need to get on with the job that we have been given dollars to do and that's significant," he said.

Baxter said from 2017 to 2019, the city will have added 41 staff members working on climate change and been making progress on such things as a home energy loan program and highrise energy loan program.

Kevin Behan, deputy director at the Clean Air Partnership, said the role of cities "is limited given their ability to generate revenue."

They're often left by other levels of government to "carry the load" on both adaption to climate change and mitigation, he said, and Ontario Premier Doug Ford's decision to cancel cap and trade has "dealt a blow" to greenhouse gas reduction.

Toronto is a leader compared to other cities, and its climate plan is a sound one, but Behan would "like to see more dollars devoted to implementing TransformTO."

"The cost of acting later is going to be a lot higher than the cost of acting now," he added.

Jessica F. Green, an associate professor of political science at the University of Toronto, believes cities can have an impact when it comes to climate change, and Toronto is "in with the pack of leaders who have set these ambitious goals," she said.

"The reality is to meet these goals, you need a huge amount of effort and money."

If people want to do something about it, she said, they can "vote for people with a real climate change agenda."

The issue hasn't been a key one so far in this year's mayoral campaign.

Mayor John Tory's campaign spokesperson, Keerthana Kamalavasan, said in a statement that Tory is "committed to fighting climate change."

"The mayor championed TransformTO, Toronto's climate change strategy, and fully funded it, which supports projects like green retrofits to Toronto Community Housing and building communities that produce net zero emissions," she said.

Tory challenger Jennifer Keesmaat said in a statement the city needs to move to infrastructure that encourages transportation options that result in less greenhouse gas emissions.

"That's why I plan to move forward with Transform Yonge, tearing down the Gardiner East and replacing it with a boulevard, and constructing a transit network that will increase options for the entire population," she said.

"Experts agree that building up our green infrastructure - planting trees, incorporating greenery on all of our streets helps reducing flooding - keeps the city cooler while sucking up carbon."

With files from David Rider

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